

COVID-19 POLICIES IMPACTING NEWCOMERS:

Key Insights from Community-Based Organizations and Government Leaders in New Mexico

OVERVIEW

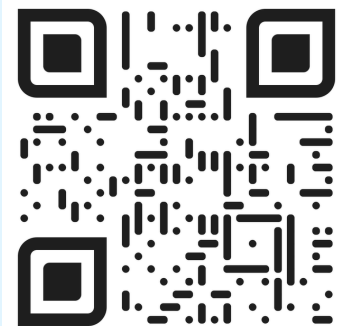
The COVID-19 pandemic was challenging for all New Mexicans, but was particularly difficult for immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers, and other newcomers, because COVID-19 related governmental assistance was not accessible for many in these communities. Thus, the role of community-based organizations (CBOs) in supporting newcomer wellbeing during the pandemic was critical. Interviews with CBO leaders and a governmental agency employee highlighted the major challenges faced by newcomers living in New Mexico (NM) between 2020-2023 as well as the responses of CBOs to these issues.

Newcomers refers to foreign-born individuals living in the United States regardless of their legal status, migratory history, or time of arrival.

Community-based organizations (CBOs) are defined as non-profit, non-governmental organizations that represent and work to address a community's needs.

The Refugee and Immigrant Wellbeing Project (RIWP) is a long-term community-based participatory research partnership that examines and addresses mental health inequities experienced by newcomers, including from the COVID-19 pandemic (funded by the National Institute of Mental Health and National Institute on Minority Health & Health Disparities R01MD007712, R01MH127733, U54MD004811).

For more information about RIWP, scan the QR Code.



Infographic by: Bianca Ruiz-Negrón, Alejandra Lemus, Aurora Arreola, and others from the RIWP Team

Who did we talk to?

For this report, we interviewed **7 CBO leaders** and **1 government agency employee**. The respective CBOs and government agency are listed in the following figure.



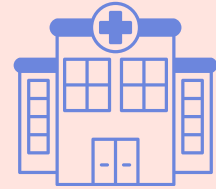
A Note from the RIWP Team

Although we may sometimes refer to COVID-19 in the past tense, we acknowledge that the pandemic is ongoing and continues to have effects on newcomer communities.

5 INSIGHTS GAINED FROM OUR CONVERSATIONS

1. What was the COVID-19 pandemic context for newcomers in NM?

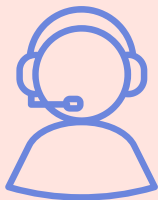
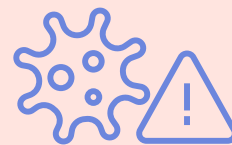
Newcomers faced numerous barriers accessing emergency economic and health-related resources and assistance in NM.



Legal status was noted as a primary barrier to accessing public health services and being able to work.

Undocumented immigrants were left out of federal and state relief, especially during the beginning of the pandemic.

Due to public safety protocols, CBOs faced challenges providing services during this time.



However, CBOs quickly responded to fill the service and resource gaps that emerged during the pandemic.

Since the “end” of the pandemic, CBO leaders have noted that the revocation of pandemic relief has had adverse effects on the lives of newcomers who were eligible for some form of pandemic-related relief.

2. What role did CBOs play in assisting newcomers?

CBOs engaged in important efforts to create and strengthen a social safety net that could meet the needs of newcomers.

They **acted as intermediaries** between communities and governmental support by:

Disseminating accurate, culturally-appropriate information



And advocating for certain policies.

They also **fostered collaboration across organizations** to address these barriers.



Because federal relief was not provided for undocumented newcomers, CBOs also **provided economic relief** in the form of the following:



direct relief (cash)



housing and utility support

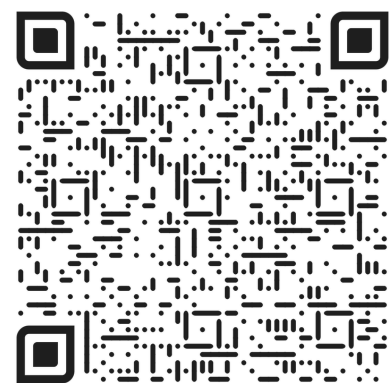


small-business support

These efforts addressed the extensive job loss and business downturn/closures related to the pandemic.

CBOs accessed funds through foundations and other grant sources, and used their extensive contacts and knowledge of the hardships and challenges faced by newcomers to direct funding in the most effective and appropriate ways.

For more information about funding sources, scan the QR Code.



3. What were key barriers that newcomers faced and how did CBOs respond to these barriers?

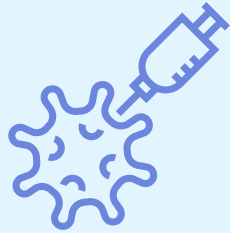
Some key barriers during this time were:



Misinformation



Language Barriers











Barriers to Vaccination Access



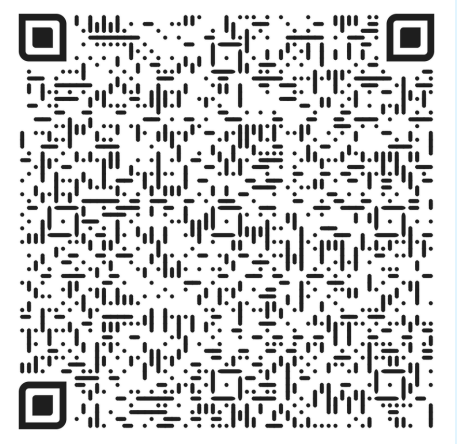
Digital Divide

CBOs responded quickly to address these through various efforts. These are summarized below.

Key Barriers	CBO Response
 <p>HIPAA Violations</p>	<p>Centro Sávila shared information around HIPAA rules that may have impacted cross-organizational collaboration.</p>

Key Barriers	CBO Response
 <p data-bbox="354 317 646 352">Public Charge Laws</p>	<p data-bbox="719 233 1417 443">Centro Sávila and New Mexico Immigrant Law Center (NMILC) provided clarifying information about Public Charge laws that were creating anxiety around accessing benefits for which people were eligible.</p>
 <p data-bbox="358 548 548 625">Tax Preparer Ordinance</p>	<p data-bbox="719 506 1442 667">NMILC helped pass a tax ordinance in 2022 with the City Council of Albuquerque to prevent newcomers from falling victim to predatory tax preparers.</p>
 <p data-bbox="358 751 646 787">Medicaid Eligibility</p>	<p data-bbox="719 711 1451 835">Encuentro and Centro Sávila continued efforts to address the (dis)continuity of Medicaid enrollment/eligibility.</p>
 <p data-bbox="354 961 646 997">Information Access</p>	<p data-bbox="719 896 1417 1058">The City of Albuquerque Office of Immigrant & Refugee Affairs (OIRA) obtained a \$4 million grant to provide COVID-19 information in 14 languages.</p>
 <p data-bbox="354 1234 630 1270">Healthcare Access</p>	<p data-bbox="719 1146 1433 1350">United Voices for Newcomer Rights (UVNR) and others worked on efforts to increase language access at University of New Mexico Hospital (UNMH) and Albuquerque Public Schools (APS) for newcomer communities</p>
 <p data-bbox="354 1570 553 1606">Digital Divide</p>	<p data-bbox="719 1461 1406 1585">New Mexico Dream Team (NMDT), Encuentro, and many of the other CBOs discussed policy efforts to bridge the digital divide</p> <p data-bbox="719 1591 1446 1715">NOTE: CBO leaders suggested that the shift to online accessibility of resources/services was one positive change from COVID-19 pandemic.</p>
 <p data-bbox="354 1864 646 1942">Barriers to Vaccination Access</p>	<p data-bbox="719 1801 1433 1963">Encuentro, Centro Sávila, UVNR, and other organizations were all a part of UNM Prevention Research Center's Vaccinate with Confidence (Vacúnate con Confianza).</p>

4. What were key policies that CBO and governmental agency leaders identified that impacted newcomer communities?



Various federal, state, and local policies that were passed during COVID-19 and continuing policy efforts that impact newcomers were identified during our conversations. These are summarized in the figure below.

For more details about these policies and efforts, scan the QR code.

Federal Policies that were Passed

American Rescue Plan Act (2021)

State and Local Policies that Passed

Language Access Policy in Albuquerque (2021)
New Mexico House Bill 112 (2021)
New Mexico House Bill 22 (2023)

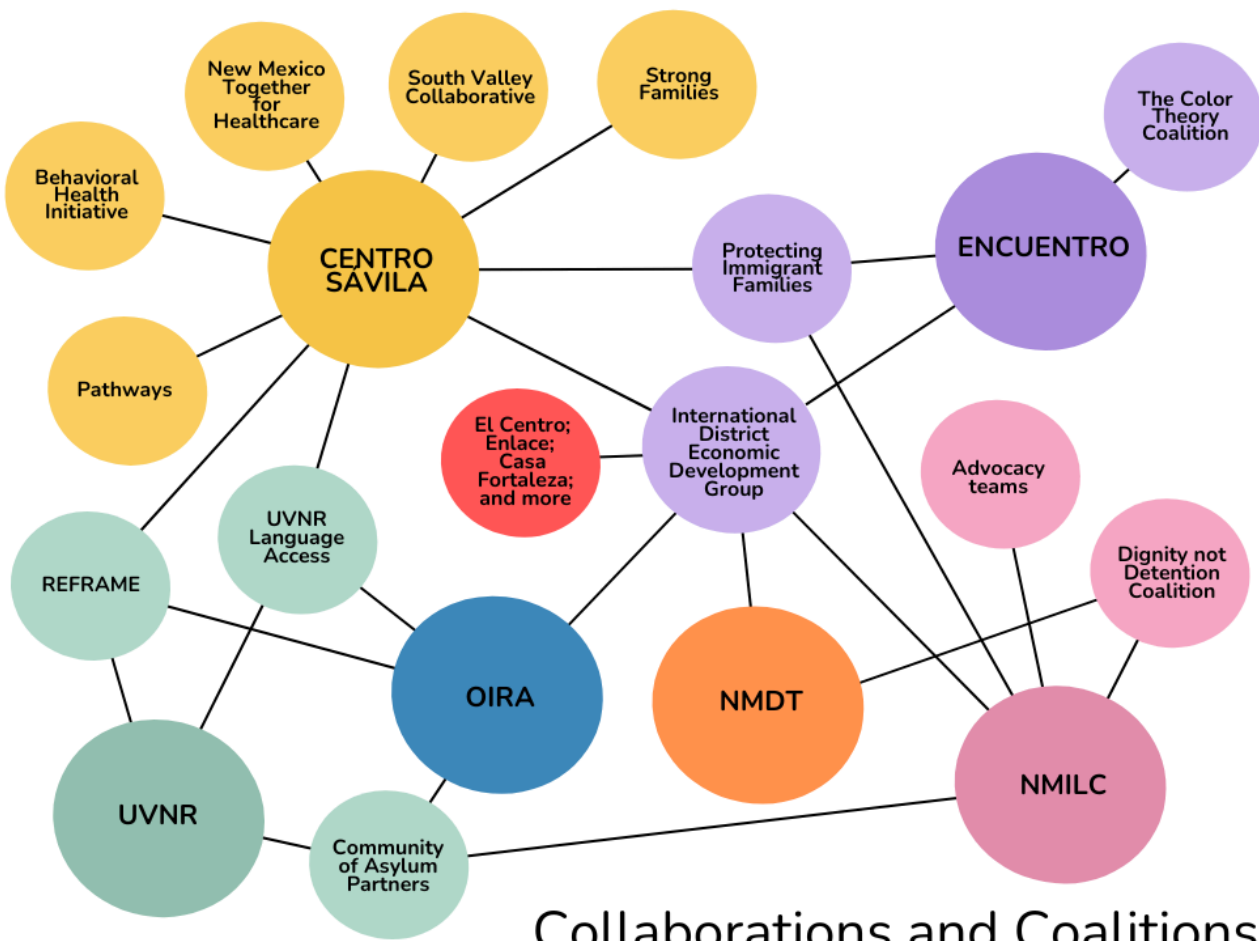
New Mexico Senate Bill 219 (2021)
New Mexico House Bill 15 (2023)
New Mexico House Bill 400 (2023)

Continuing Policy Efforts by CBOs

Lift the Bar Act
Dignity not Detention

5. How did CBOs collaborate throughout the COVID-19 pandemic to support newcomer wellbeing?

CBO leaders highlighted the importance of collaboration across organizations and agencies to address policy gaps and common barriers faced by newcomers. Some of these collaborations and coalitions can be seen in the figure below.



Collaborations and Coalitions

We want to thank the CBO directors and governmental agency staff from Encuentro, NM Immigrant Law Center (NMILC), NM Dream Team (NMDT), Centro Sávila, United Voices for Newcomer Rights (UVNR), El Centro de Igualdad y Derechos, the State of NM's Diversity and Inclusion Office, and Partnership for Community Action (PCA). We all win when our neighbors, families, friends, and community members are able to fully engage in our state.